

TESTIMONY OF MARILYN RANDALL

AMERICAN QUARTER HORSE ASSOCIATION DIRECTOR

I am here today to advocate the Montana Senate's support of Bill 418. The United States must have a humane outlet in which to deal with unfit, unsafe horses, and that method is Bill 418. This is a difficult and unpleasant proposition, but one from which we must remove emotion.

My husband and I are longtime Montana residents. He is a mixed practice veterinarian, specializing in endurance horses and vets international endurance competitions. I raise and train American Quarter Horses and am an associate professor in Rocky Mountain College's equestrian program. Additionally, I serve as one of Montana's National Directors for the American Quarter Horse Association and am an accredited judge for several breed associations and the Federation Equestre Internationale, the governing body for the Olympics and World Equestrian Games. As longtime equine professionals, we have a responsibility to raise horses that are good for their owners and good for the breed. Sometimes, however, we are called upon to make difficult decisions, and this is one of those times.

Like most equine breeders, I pride myself in raising good quality, sound horses that their owners can enjoy in a variety of recreational activities. However, I also have the responsibility of maintaining a viable equine market, and unfortunately, that includes equine processing. As an agricultural state, Montana should lead by example in agricultural matters. Montana has the option of legalizing and building a facility that can process horses in a safe, humane manner, and we should do so.

The American Quarter Horse Association's Position

First and foremost, the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) unequivocally supports the humane treatment of horses and vigorous enforcement of reasonable state and federal laws intended for that purpose. It is this fervent dedication to the welfare of the horse that drives AQHA to address the difficult issues related to humane care, transportation, and disposal of all breeds of horses.

AQHA opposes abolishing the option of horse processing until there are provisions to take care of the 80,000-100,000 horses that meet that end each year. Our support is consistent with positions established by the American Association of Equine Practitioners and American Veterinary Medical Association. As such, AQHA supports the humane, USDA-supervised, end-of-life process as a much better option than starvation, neglect, or inhumane treatment inside or outside of the United States. To date, no proposed state or federal law has addressed funding for the care for unwanted horses, long-term placement of affected horses, or established guidelines for standards of care at retirement and rescue facilities. Failing to address these core issues adversely affects the welfare of horses.

Finally, horses are livestock, and as such, are considered personal property protected under the United States Constitution. Any law that would result in "taking" of personal property

without just compensation or valid purpose is a violation of an individual's constitutional rights. Furthermore, it is a violation of the Commerce Clause to restrict interstate trade of property unreasonably. End-of-life issues for horses are a personal decision, and they should remain the right of the horse's owner.

Other Efforts

In an effort to avoid the specter of unwanted or neglected horses, AQHA serves as a founding member of the Unwanted Horse Coalition, a national organization of breed registries, competition organizations, and rescue facilities whose mission is to reduce the number of unwanted horses. The Unwanted Horse Coalition strives to improve unwanted or neglected horses' welfare by educating the public of their plight and by working in conjunction with other organizations committed to the health, safety, and responsible care and disposition of these horses. Additionally, AQHA started the Greener Pastures Program, which lets horses' owners register themselves to be contacted in the event the horse becomes unwanted or unusable for any subsequent owners.

Conclusion

The United States currently faces a multitude of economic and social issues, but we do not need to add the strain of caring for unfit or unwanted livestock to that list. This is why I feel that your support for Bill 418 is necessary. I thank you for allowing me to speak to you today on this issue, and I trust you will recognize the importance of the passage of this legislation.

Marilyn Randall